

Between Lines™

Your Guide to
Hotter Than July

Why Project 2025
Threatens Queer
Michigan

Local LGBTQ+ Leaders
Endorse Kamala Harris
for President

A BITTERSWEET FAREWELL TO BRAUN COURT

Reflections on what made the space special
— and why it's time to move on

By Sarah Bricker Hunt



Martin "Opening Day!" *Keith* *August 15, 1999* *mlb*

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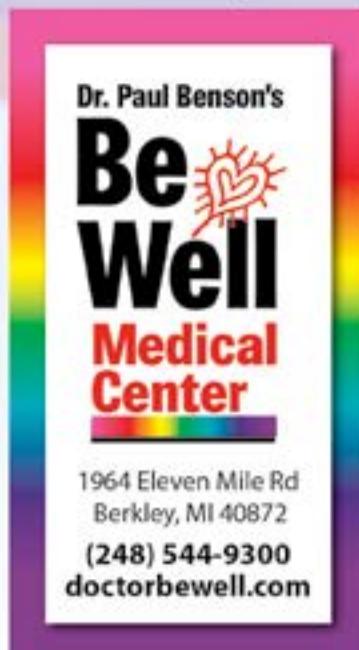
Whether it's medical, physical, or a combination of the two, challenges with sexual health can be frustrating and confusing to tackle.

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Martin Contreras and Keith Orr just before the opening of 'aut' Bar in 1999. They're joined by Mike Tice, one of the founders of the organizations that became HARC. Courtesy photo

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

As the humidity of mid-summer days glues you to your seat, if you can find a way to scrape yourself free, there are plenty of queer things to see and do throughout Michigan. Cool off at the Delta College Planetarium while enjoying a video tour of historically significant Madonna-related Bay City spots. Or, if you aren't sweating enough already, check out LGBTQ+ rock climbing at DYNO. If that doesn't suit your fancy, The Detroit Black LGBTQ+ Pride 2024, Ann Arbor Pride and the Miss Gay Michigan America pageant are sure to get you out and celebrating.



Celebrate at The Detroit Black LGBTQ+ Pride 2024

The Detroit Black LGBTQ+ Pride 2024 aims to pair meaningful discussion with celebration through a series of events running from July 25-29. From a call-to-action dinner, where community leaders and advocates will discuss disproportionate health inequities that affect Black LGBTQ+ community members to The Color of Pride Ball II and Closeout Cookout — and much more in between — these events will "support the visibility of Black LGBTQ+ people and provide safe spaces for communities of color to celebrate one another," according to their website. Come out and live it up while joining an important dialogue.

July 25-29, with locations varying for each event. Ticketing and reservation information can be found at bit.ly/3W85A5D.



Sasha Colby. Photo: Instagram

Snag Tickets for Miss Gay Michigan America

While the Miss Gay Michigan America pageant may not be until Aug. 10, it's never too early to grab your tickets to a night that promises to take you back to the excitement and glamor of the roaring '20s. Taking place at the Garden Theater in Detroit, this event is a part of the overarching Miss Gay America pageants that have been running since 1972. For more than 50 years, these events have supported and promoted excellence in the art of female impersonation.

Aug. 10, Garden Theater (3929 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Purchase tickets at bit.ly/3zPxX0W.



Sasha Colby. Photo: Instagram

Attend Pride in Ann Arbor and Royal Oak

Even as the summer rolls along into August, there are still Pride festivals happening here in Michigan!

Royal Oak's annual Pride event runs from July 26-27 in downtown Royal Oak and boasts an incredible lineup of nationally acclaimed drag talent, including "RuPaul's Drag Race All-Stars" Season 9 finalist Roxxxy Andrews, who will headline on Friday, and Bianca Del Rio, Saturday's headliner. Andrews and fellow finalist Angeria Paris VanMichaels will appear at Five15 in Royal Oak, where the finale will air on Friday night. The event features over 100 vendors, a kids zone and a mass community wedding. July 26, 3-11 p.m. and July 27, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. *Learn more at prideroyalOak.com.*



Ann Arbor Pride will take place on Aug. 3 and feature both a main stage and a space for acts from community members. "RuPaul's Drag Race" Season 15 winner Sasha Colby will make an appearance and visitors can enjoy over 100 vendors, shops, drag story time and all sorts of entertainment. Aug. 3, 12-9 p.m., downtown Ann Arbor (Main and Liberty). *Learn more at annarborpride.com.*



Madonna. Photo: Delta College



Dig Into Madonna's Bay City History

Delta College in Bay City will present "Great Affection: A Video Tour of Bay City Sites Related to Madonna" on July 26 at its planetarium. Audiences will learn about Madonna's birth and childhood in Bay City and how the city has considered her legacy during her meteoric rise to the top of the pop charts. Not only is the documentary itself star-studded, but for this showing, Michigan Rock and Roll Legends Hall of Fame curator Gary Johnson will introduce the film, and director and co-producer Malcolm Cottle will host a Q&A after the show.

July 26, 5:30 p.m and 7 p.m., Delta College Planetarium (100 Center Ave., Bay City). Reserve tickets and learn more at bit.ly/3y7hlkK.



A climber at DYNO Climbing. Photo: DYNO Detroit

Go Rock Climbing in a Queer-Friendly Space

Climbing gym DYNO Detroit hosts an LGBTQ+ climbers meetup every second Tuesday of the month. Aug. 13 will be the next opportunity to try out climbing while engaging with other local LGBTQ+ climbing enthusiasts. All skill levels are welcome, and the entry fee includes rental equipment. DYNO Detroit members can bring a guest for free. Come ready to share your favorite tunes — the gym invites participants to "pass around the aux cord to whoever wants to play DJ" on its Instagram (@dynodetroit).

Aug. 13, 6-8 p.m., DYNO Detroit (3500 Orleans St., Detroit). Sign up at bit.ly/4cNnamn.



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What You Need to Know About Project 2025 and How It Puts Michigan's LGBTQ+ Wins at Risk

Why people are searching for the document more than Taylor Swift



BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

If it feels like you're suddenly hearing about the conservative Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 agenda everywhere lately, it's not just you. In fact, Google searches for "Project 2025" have surpassed searches for Taylor Swift in recent weeks.

While the 900-page "Mandate for Leadership" portion of Project 2025 is not new — it was published more than a year ago after many months of work — Democrats have been spotlighting specific pieces of the document in the lead-up to the 2024 election.

What Is Project 2025?

Effectively, the document is a comprehensive blueprint for the next Republican president that details a plan for overhauling the federal government and implementing wide-ranging policies, from the mass deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants to eliminating the Department of Education. Importantly, Project 2025 specifically targets LGBTQ+ community members — especially (but not exclusively), transgender Americans of all ages.

Project 2025 is not formally tied to former

President Trump, but dozens of former Trump administration officials and allies have been involved, and Trump has often praised Heritage for its efforts to drive forward its conservative agenda. Regardless, the plan was created for him to follow, should he win back the presidency — that plan, Project 2025 reads, is "to unite the conservative movement and the American people against elite rule and woke culture warriors."

Several Project 2025 targets directly relate to LGBTQ+ rights:

- **Transgender rights** are specifically outlined. Gender identity beyond biological sex is outright refuted and the plan includes steps like:
 - Reinstating the ban on transgender Americans **serving in the military**
 - Barring **public schools** from referring to students by anything other than their birth names and pronouns without parental permission
 - Blocking federal funding for **gender-affirming care**
 - The Project squarely aims at **diversity**,

equity and inclusion (DEI) programs throughout the federal government and universities, seeking to entirely eliminate these efforts.

- While the plan doesn't focus on outlawing **same-sex marriage**, it specifically supports "nuclear families" that include a "married mother, father and their children."
- The plan calls for a restriction in **discrimination laws** established after the Bostock v. Clayton County 2020 Supreme Court ruling, which determined that discrimination based on sex includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

Republicans are now downplaying the significance of Project 2025 and claiming Democrats have exaggerated its contents, but Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project, says there is true cause for concern — especially for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Kaplan tells BTL that many community members seem unaware of what's at stake.

While the Michigan legislature has made significant strides in recent years, including getting an LGBTQ+ discrimination amendment

added to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, many of those achievements could effectively be erased with moves at the federal level and the Supreme Court. In fact, specific portions of Project 2025 seek to override the kinds of gains that have been made at the state level under the next Republican presidential administration.

"People really need to have an understanding of what's at stake," Kaplan says. "Right now, it's not too late."

The list of what's at risk is vast, but Kaplan honed in on some Michigan-specific gains that the state stands to lose should Project 2025 designers get their way. "Take the civil rights law that took effect this year, which explicitly covers gender identity and sexual orientation," he says. "We believe this requires school districts to treat transgender students fairly and to allow them to use restrooms in alignment with their gender identity, and yet a state like Michigan, even with explicit civil rights laws protections, would be in danger of losing funding for its public school education if they actually tried to comply with their state civil rights law."

Another Project 2025 goal aimed at the transgender community focuses on reinstating laws used to criminalize how transgender people present themselves in public. "Let's say a transgender woman walks out in public and somebody identifies that person as a transgender woman. She could be arrested and charged with impersonating a woman," Kaplan explains. "Project 2025 calls for a reinstatement of laws and ordinances like that. It's a full-barrel attack on transgender people." Michigan's recently passed "gay panic" and "trans panic" legislation, set for Whitmer's signature, would be at risk should Project 2025 become a reality, as well.

Project 2025 leans into a Trump-era tactic that has been successful at every judicial level: religious exemptions for anti-LGBTQ+ actions. Kaplan cites an ongoing argument that there should be legal religious exemptions for medical providers, who, some conservatives claim, should not have to comply with civil rights laws when it comes to hiring or even providing medical services based on their religious beliefs. "So, in other words," Kaplan says, "a doctor,

See **Project 2025**, page 22



Vice President Kamala Harris. Photo: WhiteHouse.gov

Leading Michigan Officials React to Kamala Harris' Presidential Run

Secretary Buttigieg, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Sen. Jeremy Moss show support for Harris

BY LIAM CLYMER

On Sunday, President Joe Biden released a letter to the American people detailing his decision to step aside and no longer seek reelection. Moments later, he endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to take his place, and the cogs in the political machine have been spinning rapidly since.

Harris has long maintained a supportive stance toward the LGBTQ+ community — some voters might recall the rainbow denim jacket she's donned while advocating for equal rights at Pride events.

Leading Michigan allies and queer voices have been chiming in on the change to the top of the ticket.

While there was talk of Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer running herself, she has fully endorsed Harris. "Vice President Harris has my full support," Whitmer posted on X. "So Michigan, let's get to work. We cannot let Donald Trump anywhere near the White House."

Whitmer followed up the post later in

See **Kamala Harris**, page 23

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Detroit Is Ready to Invest in You

The City of Detroit has programs that can help with higher education, criminal record expungement and so much more

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Detroit for Life: The City that has your back.

Did you know there are funds available for City residents who want to return to school, embark on a new career or to help fund their child's higher education? Need help funding a neighborhood beautification project or assistance with cleaning up a criminal record so you can take advantage of a clean start? The City of Detroit programs offer all of this and more.

The programs aim to transform Detroit into a place where the future is bright for everyone who calls the City home. Every resident is invited to get involved. These programs are for you, all because you live in Detroit.

Does your neighborhood need a glow-up?

The Neighborhood Beautification Program will help you and your neighbors create spaces by transforming vacant lots into gardens, play areas and attractive green spaces. Through a partnership with the Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency, Detroit offers grants to neighborhood associations, block clubs and non-profit organizations that want to create beauty by cleaning up abandoned lots or embarking on projects like community gardens and public space improvements. Neighborhood Beautification Program grants range from \$500 to \$15,000. While the 2024 application is closed, it's never too early to start planning for next year's application. Read more at waynemetro.org/neighborhood-beautification-grant.

You can become a part of the major facelift Detroit has been undergoing for the past several years through the City's Office of Arts, Culture and Entrepreneurship



(ACE). ACE is working with Detroit for Life to help City residents build new spaces where families and friends can gather and engage in art in various ways. Connect with ACE at detroitmi.gov/ace to learn about partnering with the City to create unique, inviting neighborhoods.

Detroit's free expungement program can help you get the fresh start you deserve.

Detroit's Project Clean Slate can help you expunge your criminal record. Detroit is a City that not only believes in second chances but one that invests in people who deserve them. Criminal record expungement — the process of erasing criminal convictions from someone's record — can make a world of difference for someone trying to find employment, housing or access to educational funding like federal financial aid.

Expungement is a particularly critical need among the LGBTQ+ community, which is overrepresented throughout the criminal justice system. According to University of Wisconsin research published in 2022, LGBTQ+ people are more than twice as likely to

be arrested compared to straight people and three times more likely to be incarcerated than the general

population. The numbers are even worse for LGBTQ+ people of color for a host of systemic reasons. The City of Detroit reports that 215,000 residents have criminal records and that approximately 168,000 people are eligible for expungement.

Project Clean Slate has assisted more than 10,000 Detroit residents since 2021, with participants seeing an average wage increase of 23% after a single year. Learn about the program at detroitmi.gov/pcs.

Get a leg up on your career (and get paid to learn).

If you feel stuck in a job that feels less like a career and more like just a paycheck, check out the City's Skills for Life program, which pays you while you work and study for your GED or job certification. Skills for Life can also connect you to career training in fields like truck driving (CDL), heavy equipment operation,

information technology, skilled trades and healthcare roles. Starting pay ranges are \$17-\$25 per hour. Learn more at detroitatwork.com/skillsforlife.

Send your kids (or you) to college — tuition-free!



Detroit Promise, a program funded by the Michigan Education Excellence Foundation, ensures all eligible high school and college students who live in Detroit have a path to a tuition-free associate degree, bachelor's degree or technical certificate at academic institutions across the state. After Pell Grants and other financial aid awards are applied, Detroit Promise kicks in to cover the rest, putting long-term goals within reach for thousands of Detroiters who may not otherwise be able to fund their post-secondary education. This incredible program has helped more than 6,000 Detroit residents since it was established in 2011. Find out more at detroitpromise.com.

Want to tell your landlord goodbye?

Detroit's Down Payment Assistance Program will help you

buy a house. The program helps residents secure down payment assistance of up to \$25,000, putting home ownership within reach for individuals who cannot afford this initial investment. In some cases, Detroit can also help residents facing foreclosure or homelessness. Go to detroitpa.org to learn more.

Trying to start a business?

Detroit loves entrepreneurs! Motor City Match helps residents create new, long-lasting businesses and assists established business owners in expanding their operations. This program offers personalized support tailored to meet the needs of wide-ranging businesses at any development stage. So far, the program has helped more than 2,000 business owners through more than \$18 million in grants.

While you're exploring entrepreneurship opportunities, don't sleep on the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, which can keep you connected to Detroit's thriving LGBTQ-owned business community. President Kevin Heard told BTL earlier this year that the Chamber can help business owners make and maintain those all-important connections. "We connect people to others who respect and understand and who are often a part of the community," he said.

Invest in yourself and your community — get started today. That's why we're Detroit for Life!

The City has taken special care to provide easy access to Detroit residents to the resources you're looking for. Visit detroitmi.gov/detroitforlife to get started. You'll find links to each opportunity, contact information and all kinds of inspiration from people just like you who have taken advantage of all the programs Detroit has to offer.

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A Group of Catholic Therapists Sue for Right to Perform Conversion Therapy Despite State Ban



Michigan LGBTQ+ orgs respond: Ban is 'life-saving'

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Equating conversion therapy with "torture," 19 LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ-affirming organizations in Michigan have issued a statement in response to a federal complaint filed in Michigan Western District on July 12 against House Bill 4616, which seeks to ban the discredited practice.

The lawsuit challenges the constitutionality of HB 4616, signed into law by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in July 2023. The suit argues that the new law impedes the free speech and free exercise rights of a group of Catholic therapists. The law, the suit reads, attempts to "control counselors' speech" and "harms vulnerable children by depriving them of the compassionate counseling they so desperately need."

The law "goes out of its way to say that 'counseling that provides assistance to an individual undergoing a gender transition' is permitted, while counseling that helps an individual accept her biological sex is not," the suit reads.

The conservative Becket Fund for Religious Liberty is behind the lawsuit. Becket Fund successfully represented Michigan's St. Vincent Catholic Charities in a case focused on whether religious foster care and adoption agencies can decline to work with same-sex couples.

The suit names several defendants, including Gov. Whitmer, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Elizabeth Hertel, who serves as director of Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the Michigan boards of counseling, social workers and psychology and leaders at the state's Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. Ultimately, the suit asks the court to find that the law violates constitutional rights to free speech, free exercise and due process and seeks a permanent injunction prohibiting the state from enforcing the law.

Organizations including Equality

Michigan, Affirmations, Corktown Health, Metropolitan Community Church - Detroit, MiGen, Ruth Ellis Center and Stand with Trans signed on to the statement, issued on July 13. "House Bill 4616 is saving young lives in Michigan," the statement reads, "and any attempts to undermine and undercut this law will serve only to subject LGBTQ+ people to serious psychological and physical harm."

"House Bill 4616 is a suicide prevention bill, period. Protecting LGBTQ young people from conversion 'therapy' in Michigan is literally life-saving," said Erin Knott, Equality Michigan Executive Director, in the statement. "Michigan's LGBTQ youth should be free from needless attacks and torture, and deserve to live in a state where they can be healthy, safe, and reach their full potential."

Conversion therapy is "torturous," the statement continues, citing research published in the American Journal of Public Health in 2020, which found that youth who had experienced conversion therapy were more than twice as likely to report a suicide attempt in the prior year than youth who were

not. Additional analysis published in JAMA Pediatrics found that conversion therapy participants were more likely to experience serious psychological distress or depression and were more likely to engage in illicit drug use. Most alarmingly, they were more likely to attempt and die from suicide.

Every prominent professional medical and mental health association in America has condemned the practice, including the American Psychiatric Association and the American Medical Association. Bill sponsor Rep. Felicia Brabec, who represents Michigan's 33rd District, said in the statement, "As a clinical psychologist, I cannot emphasize enough how dangerous this practice is and that to call it 'therapy' is misleading and treacherous."

The statement concludes:

"As organizations that directly serve and support LGBTQ+ Michiganders, we cherish and champion our freedoms, including that of speech and expression. But it's clear to us that torturing children, which is exactly what conversion "therapy" is, is not a fundamental right. The intent of the law is to protect youth who are vulnerable to harm or violence, whether that occurs in a medical or commercial context. The law does not prevent LGBTQ+ people from seeking legitimate medical support or spiritual support from their faith leader in the exploration of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We changed the law in Michigan. Those who oppose it are trying to change the child. There is no cure for one's sexual orientation or gender identity because neither of those is an illness. To the invaluable LGBTQ+ young people in our State, and to all the survivors of conversion "therapy," we want you to know that there is a strong coalition of organizations and elected officials, as well as a majority of residents in Michigan, that hear you, see you, and believe you are deserving of the freedom to be who you are and love who you love. Equality Michigan and our undersigned partners will never stop fighting for you and your families."

Your Vote Decides Who Sits on the Michigan Supreme Court

It seems like there's news about the U.S. Supreme Court nearly every day. But what doesn't get nearly enough attention is the Michigan Supreme Court – and the fact that we, the people, have the power to elect our Supreme Court. Michigan is one of just 24 states that lets voters decide who sits on the highest court in the state. And every Michigander should know how the process works and why it matters.

This November, Michiganders get to choose who fills two spots on the court. This is an important civic duty and an opportunity to shape this vitally important institution. The Michigan Supreme Court is the guardian of justice, fairness, and freedoms for all Michiganders. The seven-person court makes decisions that touch every aspect of our lives, from civil rights and criminal justice to environmental protection and economic regulations.

Chances are, you know what's at stake in the next few years: reproductive rights, abortion laws, gun safety, and fair elections – and there's no telling what other issues may come before the court. The Michigan Supreme Court makes the ultimate decisions on the most challenging legal cases in the state, which require thoughtful, insightful, and robust deliberation to help ensure a fair outcome.

In Michigan, Supreme Court candidates are nominated by a political party, but their party affiliation is not included on the ballot. The justices are elected for eight-year terms, which means the votes you cast this year will make a difference for nearly a decade.

Plenty of Michiganders like to check the straight-party box, which is just fine – but don't stop there. To cast your vote for the Supreme Court candidates of your choice, you have to keep going to the non-partisan section of your ballot. You can't miss it. Get to know the candidates in advance, then mark the ballot to vote for the two people you think will do the best job of ensuring a strong, equitable future for our state.

Being a Michigan Supreme Court justice requires integrity, fairness, and a strong understanding of the law. In fact, candidates must be a licensed Michigan lawyer for at least five years. The Michigan Supreme Court is one of the three equal branches of our state government, along with the Legislature and Governor. Michigan voters have the privilege of choosing who is appointed to all three branches – and it's an important responsibility.

Remember: Don't stop at the top! Go all the way down the ballot to cast your vote for the two Michigan Supreme Court candidates of your choice. Your vote counts in every race, so make sure your voice is heard in this one, too.

Want to know more about the Michigan Supreme Court, the voting process, or how to spread the word about the importance of electing the people who will sit on our state's highest court? Visit www.MISupremeCourtRocks.com to get all the information you need to play your part in this important part of this year's election.

-Erin Knott, Equality Michigan Executive Director



Disgraced Felon Donald Trump Is the Worst Candidate Regardless of Who He Runs Against



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I am writing this mere hours after learning that President Joe Biden has stepped back from the presidential race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris.

I got in very late last night from Philadelphia, the day after a bazillion flights were canceled due to the big Microsoft/CrowdStrike crash. I didn't get to sleep until 2:30 a.m. and didn't sleep well. Now I feel like I'm coming down with something.

Needless to say, it's been a day. I don't think I am in the right headspace for cogency, but deadlines are deadlines and here we are.

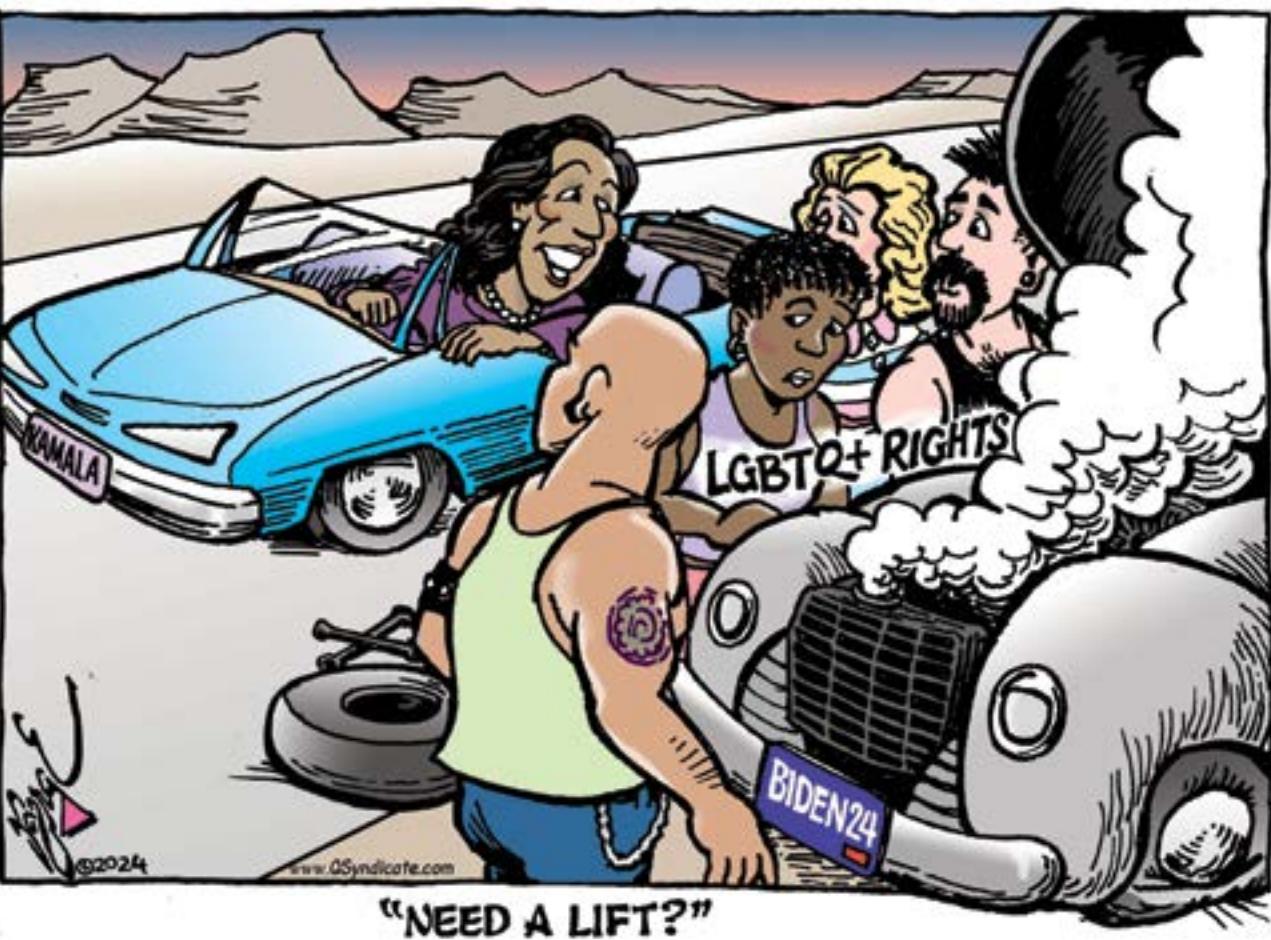
Anyway, about the Biden thing. Let me first of all say that it has been LESS THAN AMUSING to watch the Democrats flailing around while running against an absolutely reprehensible man who has no business holding any elected office ever again in his life because CRIMES.

Secondly, let's all take a deep breath. I fully realize that this is all out of my control and, likely, out of yours, too.

I believe that Vice President Harris can absolutely beat disgraced felon Donald Trump. We're in a post-Roe world and women are super pissed.

Thirdly, I actually like Vice President Harris. I chose her over Biden in the primary, in fact. Not that it matters. It's very clear she is the path forward. People floating names like California Gov. Gavin Newsom (who has endorsed Harris) or even, for whatever the fuck reason, Mitt Romney, need to shut up. It's Kamala time and we're just living in it.

Defeating Trump is, well, really important! We cannot let him hold our country hostage again and entrench his policies — or, I should say, the policies drafted for him by extremist



right-wing organizations that he will absolutely carry out — into law for decades.

It is not too late to do this. I believe that Vice President Harris can absolutely beat disgraced felon Donald Trump. We're in a post-Roe world and women are super pissed.

LGBTQ+ people and our allies need to be very clear-eyed that Trump's Supreme Court (which has a SIX-PERSON CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY; there are only three liberal justices) will absolutely undo marriage equality as quickly as they did abortion rights.

Other countries have far shorter campaign cycles than the length of time the U.S. has between now and November. We can do this.

But it isn't going to be easy. Trump's base is hella pumped, especially after the assassination attempt. Which was majorly fucked up and not OK. It is also really weird so many Trump supporters are wearing gauze on their ears in solidarity. People are weird. And while Trump is not a popular guy, he already won once despite what many people thought possible.

But never underestimate your fellow American to be a racist and misogynist piece of trash! In fact, if someone in your life has been managing to hide their white supremacist and sexist stripes, don't worry! They will reveal them soon enough. Since Vice President Harris is a woman and also Black and also of South Asian descent.

Do I love everything about her? No, I do not. Her career as

a prosecutor in California is at times problematic! That said, there will be no such thing as progressive criminal justice reform if Trump is elected again.

And forget about any progress in LGBTQ+ equality. President Biden has been the most pro-LGBTQ+ president ever and Vice President Harris is absolutely a part of that legacy.

The Human Rights Campaign endorsed Vice President Harris on the same day as Biden's announcement.

"We owe the Biden-Harris team a debt of gratitude for leading the country out of a state of chaos and constant crisis under former President Trump," HRC President Kelley Robinson said in a statement. And [HRC] endorses the tough, formidable and experienced Vice President Kamala Harris for president."

"The Biden-Harris Administration has been the most pro-equality in history," HRC's statement continued. "Since the 2021 inauguration, the administration has taken extraordinary steps to advance equality. In 2022, President Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act into law, a landmark piece of legislation that codified federal protections for same-sex and interracial marriages. They have issued new administrative rules protecting LGBTQ+ youth from discrimination and harassment in schools, ensuring LGBTQ+ youth are protected in the foster care system and protecting LGBTQ+ patients from discrimination in health care. They have also filled the administration with members of the LGBTQ+ community, appointing a record 200+ LGBTQ+ people across each level of government and nominating a number of LGBTQ+ judges."

That's a pretty great record! Plus, the vice president wore that shiny rainbow jacket during Pride.

I rest my case!

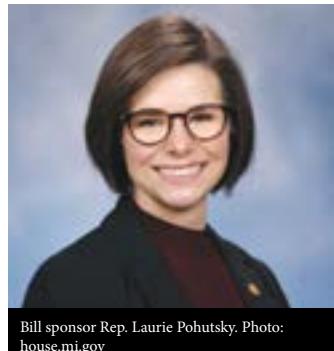
Appeals Court Ruling Targets Rights of Trans Community

On July 15, the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a ban preventing trans people the ability to amend their birth certificates to align with their gender. In a 2-1 decision, a three-judge panel of the court ruled that Tennessee's policy is constitutional, writing that "there is no fundamental right to a birth certificate recording gender identity instead of biological sex." The decision is a significant blow to transgender Americans living in the Court's jurisdiction, which includes Michigan — but there's good news for the trans community

here, and we have Attorney General Dana Nessel to thank for that.

Nessel's 2021 opinion declared that a Michigan law requiring "sex-reassignment surgery" to change a sex designation on a birth certificate was unconstitutional. Transgender Michiganders are currently protected by this declaration. However, the 6th Circuit Court's ruling opens the door for a future state Attorney General to issue a new declaration using the ruling as justification for reintroducing a ban.

Michigan House Bills 5300-5303, currently pending in the Michigan House of Representatives, offer a proactive approach to transgender protections. The bills guarantee access to accurate legal names and identity documents. Reach out to your representatives in support of the bill package at house.mi.gov.



Bill sponsor Rep. Laurie Pohutsky. Photo: house.mi.gov

Whitmer Signs Law Banning Gay, Trans 'Panic' Defenses

On July 23, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed into law a bill prohibiting LGBTQ+ "panic" legal

defenses in Michigan. The law, which will go into effect later this year, will end the practice of judges or juries acquitting defendants facing assault or murder charges if they successfully argue they were provoked by the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity. It's a law Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, who sponsored the House bill, had been

working to eradicate for several years.

Pohutsky, who is running for reelection in the 2024 election, told BTL earlier this year, "We don't want people to be able to commit violent acts against them and then get away with it or get a slap on the wrist because of who they assaulted, or in some cases who they murdered."

Super Queer Emmy Nominations

The 2024 Emmy nominations are in, and they are notably queer, considering a relatively quiet 2023 for queer-forward creativity on TV. Series like "The Morning Show," which recently featured a lesbian storyline, as well as mainstays like "RuPaul's Drag Race" got nods, as well as LGBTQ+ actors including Jodie Foster ("True Detective: Night Country"), Matt Bomer and Jonathan Bailey ("Fellow Travelers"), Bowen Yang ("SNL") and Hannah Einbinder ("Hacks"). It'll be a minute before we find out the winners — The Emmys will air on Jan. 5, 2025.

Volunteer Opportunity: Stand with Trans Picnic

Stand with Trans' annual family picnic, set for Aug. 11 from 12-4 p.m. at Memorial Park in Royal Oak, will focus on fun for the whole family. Attendees will enjoy craft stations, food service and community games. Organizers need your help to make it a memorable, meaningful experience for all. Sign up to help at standwithtrans.org/become-a-swt-volunteer.

Republicans Break Grindr in Milwaukee

We don't know exactly what kind of fun Republicans were getting up to at the Milwaukee Republican National Convention, apart from standing around with bandages on their ears earlier this month, but we do know Grindr had trouble keeping up. Over 1,000 users reported an outage in the Milwaukee area during the event. "Grindr executives are calling the RNC convention the Grindr Superbowl," ex-Congressman George Santos said in a video post on X.



July Is Disability Pride Month

LGBTQ+ adults living with disabilities face higher instances of unemployment, lower wages and discriminatory hiring practices, as well as higher rates of poverty and mental health conditions including depression and anxiety. Disability Pride Month, which coincides with the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law in 1990, was created to shine a light on the barriers disabled people are still dealing with decades later.

The Disability Pride Flag was created in 2021 by Ann Magill, who has cerebral palsy. The red stripe represents physical disability; the gold, neurodiversity; the white, invisible disabilities; the blue, emotional and psychiatric disabilities; the green, sensory disabilities including deafness, blindness and many other sensory disabilities. The faded black background represents mourning and rage for victims of ableist violence and abuse.



Your Guide to This Year's Hotter Than July

How you can be a part of LGBT Detroit's 30th anniversary

BY JASON COLLINS

Hotter Than July, LGBT Detroit's annual Black Pride event, is right around the corner. Get ready for a whole weekend of events that celebrate Detroit's LGBTQ+ community while offering a safe space for showcasing its culture.

The celebration, which started in 1995, now holds the title of the world's second-oldest Black LGBTQ+ Pride. But this year is extra special for the organization as it celebrates its 30th anniversary with the release of the documentary "30 Years of LGBT Detroit: A Documentary Preserving Three Decades."

Other key events include the annual candlelight vigil, the annual "family reunion" and a concert experience featuring Grammy-nominated artist B. Slade, formerly known under the gospel moniker Tonéx. Learn more about all the Hotter Than July events at lgbtdetroit.org.

Friday, July 26: A Candlelight Vigil

6:30 p.m., The Wright Museum (315 E. Warren St., Detroit)

Hotter Than July begins as a remembrance with a candlelight vigil honoring both the ancestors and spirit of the community. LGBT Detroit Director A. Nzere Kwabena reveals that, this year, attendees are invited to submit the name of someone they want to honor. "We'll make sure we provide a moment where we'll honor that person at the vigil," he tells BTL.

This free event will be hosted in the Latimer Cafe Courtyard, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.



Past Hotter Than July attendees. Photo: BTL archives

Friday, July 26: '30 Years of LGBT Detroit' Documentary Screening and Q&A

7:30 p.m., The Wright Museum (315 E. Warren St., Detroit)

After the candlelight vigil, stick around for the screening of "30 Years of LGBT Detroit: A Documentary Preserving Three Decades." The film, directed by LGBT Detroit's Broadcast Manager Chris Inpaq Sutton, captures the vast experiences of the LGBTQ+ community as it continues to thrive within Detroit. Sutton told BTL

earlier this year, "If there's one thing that I would want audiences to walk away with after viewing the '30 Years of LGBT Detroit' documentary, it is the collective power we have when we unite together as a community."

Food and refreshments will be served to those watching the documentary, which will be shown at 9 p.m.

followed by a panel discussion.

Friday, July 26: SPICE Reunion: Celebrating Sisterhood Across Generations

6 p.m., Kofi House: The Center for Lesbians and Girls (135 Hazelwood St., Highland Park)

Local LGBTQ+ group Sistah's Providing Intelligence, Creativity and Empowerment (S.P.I.C.E.) will host a reunion on Friday evening. Andrea Davis, program director for S.P.I.C.E., reveals that the group was created as a "grassroots group for lesbians to gather to discuss things that are important to their lives, for identification purposes and support."

Terri Leverette from S.P.I.C.E. reveals that for her this reunion is all about celebrating the "recognition, visibility and durability of what S.P.I.C.E provided for over 20 years." For Leverette, S.P.I.C.E. fosters engagement and meets the needs of the local community.

Entrance to the free event starts at 6 p.m.

Saturday, July 27: The People of African Descent Conference and Family Reunion

12 p.m., Zion Lutheran Church (143 Albany St., Ferndale)

The Zion Lutheran Church, along with Rev. Roland Stringfellow and

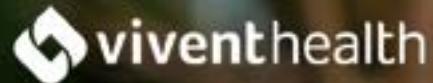
See Hotter Than July, page 18



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Hotter Than July

Continued from page 14

Elder Hattie Alexander-Key, will host this groundbreaking conference on Black queer spirituality. The conference, in partnership with the Metropolitan Community Church's People of African Descent (PAD), will focus on topics like healing from Black queer trauma, the importance of LGBTQ-affirming churches and looking to the future. Senior pastor at MCC-Detroit, Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow, told BTL, the event "encourages people with the African diaspora around the intersection of spirituality and their identity."

Rev. Stringfellow says the conference will seek to "break down the stigma that African American people of faith do not support the LGBTQ+ community," adding that he hopes the event can build a bridge between the queer community and the Black church.

Saturday, July 27: The Bishop Yvette Flunder Birthday Dinner

7 p.m., Affirmations
Community Center (290 W.
9 Mile Road, Ferndale)

Spend Saturday evening celebrating the birthday of Bishop Yvette Flunder, who is a special guest for the weekend. Bishop Yvette has been involved in the church and active in the community for over 20 years, including, at one point, leading her own transgender choir. For decades, Bishop Yvette has been challenging the stigma of homophobia and HIV and serving as an advocate for Black lesbians. Rev. Jeffrey Seals from One Church Detroit said that bringing Bishop Yvette to Hotter Than July is "a dream come true."

Dinner will include a Jamaican potluck and soulful vegan favorites.

Saturday, July 27: Kink Museum

10 p.m., The Eagle at
Menjo's (950 W. McNichols
Road)

End your Saturday with the ONYX Great Lakes Kink Museum event. Kwabena says the ONYX exhibit "provides education around the kink and fetish community." This exciting event promises an exhilarating evening of demos, discussion panels, playing and dancing. Be sure to don your favorite outfit according to the kink dress code, bring your own equipment and have fun in a safe and judgment-free zone.

Xanatos ONYX, the ONYX Great Lakes Secretary, told BTL that the event provides a safe and welcoming environment for kinksters and members of the leather community to celebrate. "Honoring the ONYX mission to educate, empower and explore, Kink Museum offers demonstrations of various kinks and fetishes, as well as the opportunity to socialize with other members of the leather and kink community in a party atmosphere," Xanatos said.

Organizers expect over 100 attendees from Southeast Michigan and across the country at the Kink Museum event, the signature annual event for ONYX Great Lakes, which Xanatos said was founded in 2016 to promote education and empowerment of people of color men in the leather and kink communities of Michigan, Ohio, Northern Kentucky, Western Pennsylvania and Ontario. Xanatos invites the community to apply for membership in ONYX Great Lakes, which is open to all races and gender expressions.

The event runs from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Sunday, July 28: The Hotter Than July Worship Service

12 p.m., Tindell Activities
Center (10301 W. 7 Mile
Road)

Dress in your finest white outfit and enjoy an evening of dance and praise at One Church Detroit's worship service. Rev. Jeffrey Seals explains that One Church Detroit offers a safe space for Black queer people to worship "in the fullness of who we are." Rev. Seals tells BTL, "Pride to me is a movement about people becoming who we are and having that faith [and] spiritually is an added bonus."

The free worship service starts at 12 p.m. with a dinner afterwards.

Sunday, July 28: B.Slade in Concert

6:30 p.m., Sound Board
at MotorCity Casino (2901
Grand River Ave.)

Hotter Than July culminates with a soulful concert from two-time Emmy award-winning and Grammy nominee B.Slade, who has written songs for music icons such as Janet Jackson, Snoop Dog and Faith Evans. Before changing his stage name from Tonéx to B.Slade in 2010, his music leaned heavily into the gospel music he grew up with. The name B.Slade represents both a shift in sound and identity — after coming out publicly the year before, he has become known for breaking out of boxes musically, too. He told Essence that he would describe himself now as a "recording activist."

Purchase tickets for the B.Slade show at Ticketmaster.com.

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OFFICIAL 2024 SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, JULY 26

THE CANDLELIGHT VIGIL
LOCATION - THE WRIGHT MUSEUM
TIME - 6:30 TO 7:30 PM

30 YEARS OF LGBT DETROIT
DOCUMENTARY SCREENING
LOCATION - THE WRIGHT MUSEUM
TIME - 7:30 - 10:00 PM

MCC MOTOWN RIVERBOAT CRUISE
LOCATION - PRINCESS RIVERBOAT
TIME - 6:00 TO 10:00 PM

S.P.I.C.E REUNION
CELEBRATING SISTERHOOD
ACROSS GENERATIONS
LOCATION - KOFI HOUSE
TIME - 6:00 TO 10:00 PM

SATURDAY, JULY 27

MCC PEOPLE OF AFRICAN
DESCENT CONFERENCE
LOCATION - ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH
TIME - 12:00 TO 6:00 PM

BISHOP FLUNDER'S
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
LOCATION - AFFIRMATIONS FERNDALE
COMMUNITY CENTER
TIME - 6:00 TO 10:00 PM

ONYX GREAT LAKES PRESENTS
THE KINK MUSEUM
LOCATION - THE EAGLE
(AT THE MENJOS COMPLEX)
TIME - 10:00 TO 2:00 AM

SUNDAY, JULY 28

THE WORSHIP SERVICE
LOCATION - TINDELL ACTIVITY CENTER
TIME - 12:00 TO 3:00 PM

THE B.SLADE EXPERIENCE
HEART & SOUL CONCERT
LOCATION - SOUND BOARD
MOTORCITY CASINO-HOTEL
TIME - 7:30 PM TO 10:00 PM

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Preserving Three Decades of Local Black Queer History

‘30 Years of LGBT Detroit’ spotlights influential queer non-profit

BY JASON COLLINS

Chris Inpaq Sutton's groundbreaking film “30 Years of LGBT Detroit: A Documentary Preserving Three Decades” celebrates three decades of community empowerment as it recognizes LGBT Detroit as a Michigan-based organization that has advocated for LGBTQ+ culture, education and human rights during that time.

“Filming this documentary has become a healing process for the inner gay child in me,” he says, “and I hope that it can also be healing for audiences who witness this journey on screen.”

A native Detroiter, Sutton grew up in the Seven Mile and Meyers Road corridor. Though he is currently the program manager for the LGBT Detroit Broadcast Network and part of the team behind the successful “Listen Togethr” podcast, “it was hard for me to even imagine making it to adulthood,” he says, “let alone living my dream as an unapologetic, openly Black gay filmmaker thriving in Detroit.”

When he thinks back to his younger self, Sutton says at times he felt his sexuality had been a curse. Today, he says “embracing that aspect of myself has become such a profound blessing.”

He also now embraces queerness in his work as a visual storyteller, serving as director, cinematographer and video editor. His films often focus on Detroit’s LGBTQ+ community and include shorts like “London” (2010) and “Voodoo” (2016) and documentaries like “What’s T” (2018) and “Chosen Family” (2020).

Sutton joined KICK, the predecessor to LGBT Detroit, early in his career, as an “extremely self-conscious and somewhat lost Black gay youth,” he says. “When I entered the LGBT Detroit offices for the first time in 2012, I discovered a space where not only was I embraced fully in being my authentic self, but I also found a chosen family, which provided me with love and support that still fills my heart to this day. So now, working at LGBT Detroit full-time as the in-house broadcast manager and directing this upcoming documentary, it truly feels that my journey in this community has come full



Chris Sutton. Photo: Andrew Potter

circle.”

Even when Sutton isn’t working, he’s still constantly thinking about filmmaking “when I eat, sleep, dream or simply navigate day-to-day tasks,” he says. “It truly is my life force.”

His film premieres during LGBT Detroit’s annual Pride event Hotter Than July at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, July 26 at the Wright Museum. In anticipation of the premiere, Sutton spoke to BTL about the making of the film and the inspiration behind it.

How did the concept for the documentary come about?

LGBT Detroit has a long history of documenting and honoring the vast experiences of the LGBTQ+ community that continues to thrive within Detroit, which has often been undocumented and highly underrepresented. Highlighting our stories has especially been a key focus for LGBT Detroit’s Executive Director, A. Nzere Kwabena.

When I met Nzere as a young, aspiring filmmaker in 2012, I had the opportunity to showcase a short film I shot, recapping the 2011 Hotter Than July festivities. I’ve

See **Chris Sutton**, page 28



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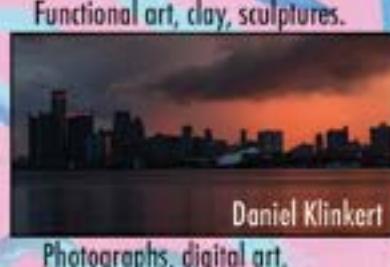
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Project 2025

Continued from page 6

even a general practitioner, who doesn't want to treat someone who is transgender or who happens to be gay, can articulate their religious beliefs and would be exempt from having to comply with civil rights law. It would sanction discrimination in the name of religion."

Kaplan emphasizes that even when there are state civil rights laws on the books, individuals would be sure to challenge these state laws, claiming they violate the freedom of religion — an argument that would continue to gain traction in the far right-leaning federal court system Project 2025 designers dream about. In fact, this has already happened with the 303 Creative LLC v. Elenis case, which centered on whether a website designer was compelled to comply with a Colorado civil rights law when they were asked to design a site for a same-sex couple. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the website designer; soon after, a hair salon owner in Traverse City publicly stated that she would no longer serve transgender clients, citing the ruling as proof that she didn't have to. The owner was charged under the city's anti-discrimination law and later sued the city, but a judge threw out her case in March.

Kaplan urges people to pay attention to what the Trump administration focused on and to expect more of the same in a new term. There's no reason to think Project 2025's aims wouldn't be front and center should Trump be reelected. "During the Trump administration, they rescinded guidelines protecting transgender students with regards to bathrooms. And remember, in a tweet, Trump excluded transgender people from the military — a tweet was all it took," Kaplan recalls.

Apart from LGBTQ-specific issues, many other Project 2025 targets would impact virtually every American or members of their family:

- In addition to **abolishing the Department of Education**, other agencies on the chopping block include the Department of Homeland Security, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The plan calls for privatizing the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).
- **Abortion restrictions** are an important piece of Project 2025, which directs the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to revoke its approval of the abortion drug mifepristone. It also calls for revoking federal funding for healthcare coverage for abortion and for states to report all abortions that take place there to the federal government.
- Project 2025 directs the next Republican president to **leave the Paris Climate Agreement**, to undo much of the federal government's climate work and to overhaul the Department of Energy to promote oil

and natural gas while deemphasizing green energy sources.

• **Public education** is also in the crosshairs. Project 2025's proposed "school choice" policy mirrors that of several conservative-leaning states where public funds can be used for students to attend private or religious schools. The plan bars "critical race theory" from being taught in federally funded schools and allows parents to sue schools they claim have acted improperly by teaching controversial subjects.

• **Student loan relief** efforts would end, including the long-standing public service loan forgiveness program and income-driven repayment plans.

• The plan calls for **banning TikTok** and reforming Section 230, which shields tech companies and social media networks from being sued over content that appears on their platforms.

• The plan includes a "top-to-bottom overhaul" of the **Department of Justice** and the FBI to rid "radical left ideologies." A new agency would focus on violent crime and filing litigation consistent with the next Republican president's agenda.

• Project 2025 radically alters the current **tax structure**, eliminating most deductions and credits and instituting a 15% rate for anyone under the Social Security wage base (currently \$168,000) and 30% for taxpayers earning more than that — meaning the lowest-income taxpayers would pay more and some higher earners will pay less. The corporate tax rate would be lowered to 18% from the current 21%.

• The project describes **China** as a "totalitarian enemy" of the U.S. and directs the country to pull out of international organizations like the World Health Organization and many United Nations agencies.

• The plan includes **cuts to Medicaid** and new work requirements to receive coverage as well as reforms to Medicare, including making Medicare Advantage, a paid Medicare supplement, the default for every patient.

Kaplan is especially concerned about the Project's plans for overhauling the judicial branch. Citing ACLU research, Kaplan notes that Trump appointed 234 judges to serve lifetime appointments on the federal court, including one-third of the justices on the U.S. Supreme Court. Of these, 85% were white, 74% were male and four of 10 had previously issued decisions against LGBTQ+ rights.

This stands in stark contrast to Biden's appointments, thus far. As of May 22, Biden had appointed 201 federal judges, including one Supreme Court Justice: 60% are people of color and 64% are female. Biden has nominated more women, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals than any other president in U.S. history. "That's a clear distinction," Kaplan notes.

• Kamala Harris

Continued from page 7

the day, telling reporters in Lansing, "I'm not leaving Michigan. I'm proud to be the governor of Michigan. I've been consistent. I know everyone is always suspicious and asking this question over and over again. I know you're doing your job — I'm not going anywhere."

U.S. Secretary of Transportation and openly gay Michigan resident Pete Buttigieg also shared his thoughts on X. "Kamala Harris is now the right person to take up the torch, defeat Donald Trump, and succeed Joe Biden as President," Buttigieg wrote. "I have seen her extraordinary leadership firsthand, working closely with her during the 2020 campaign and then in the historically effective Biden-Harris administration. I will do all that I can to help her win this election to lead America forward as our next President."

Joining Buttigieg's remarks on X, Michigan's Attorney General and out lesbian Dana Nessel posted her own show of support. "Kamala Harris will make an outstanding President of the United States, and I enthusiastically support her candidacy," Nessel posted. "Let's get it done, America!"

Meanwhile, out Michigan Sen. Jeremy Moss posted, "Let's get to work and deliver Michigan for the next President of the United States, @KamalaHarris!" alongside a selfie with the vice president.

Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow is board president of Inclusive Justice of Michigan and a resource coordinator for MiGen, Michigan's LGBTQ+ elder support network. He said that

the change not only reinvigorated him but left him feeling more respect toward Biden. "I was always 'ho hum' about Joe Biden as a President until Sunday afternoon," Stringfellow said. "His decision to drop out of the race after it was apparent he did not have a clear path to victory is admirable and shows great leadership. I deeply admire him as someone

abortion ban and the implementation of Project 2025. I am now energized about the race for the White House!"

Across social media, queer youth have quickly started to rally behind Harris with sighs of relief and videos of Harris set to Chappell Roan's girl-power anthem "Femininomenon."

service and his longtime support for the LGBTQ+ community," Robinson said. "... The Human Rights Campaign could not be prouder to endorse Vice President Kamala Harris and commit to channeling our resources and supporters to work to elect the first Black and South Asian woman president of the United States."

In addition to advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, before Biden made his announcement, Harris had been spending much of her time on the campaign trail recently to discuss reproductive rights.

Earlier this month, at the Essence Festival of Culture in New Orleans, Harris discussed her motivations behind her staunch support of bodily autonomy. "So, many of you know I was a prosecutor; you may not know one of the reasons why," Harris said. "When I was in high school, I learned that my best friend was being molested by her stepfather. When I learned, I said, 'You have to come live with us.' I called up my mother and she said, 'Of course she does.' And she lived with us. So I decided at a young age that I wanted to take on what I could do to protect women and children against violence."

And while the path forward may remain unclear, much like Biden reminded Americans in the final remarks of his letter, the only way to ensure safety from the rhetoric and plans of Trump is to move forward together.

"I believe today what I always have: There is nothing America can't do — when we do it together," Biden wrote. "We just have to remember we are the United States of America."

“So Michigan, let's get to work. We cannot let Donald Trump anywhere near the White House.”

— Gov. Gretchen Whitmer

who has done his part in saving American democracy."

"I am now absolutely thrilled about the candidacy of Vice President Kamala Harris," he added. "At this moment, she is the most qualified person to lead our country and I believe she is what our nation needs to counteract the leanings toward a national

On the advocacy front, several prominent groups have rallied behind Harris. Speaking on behalf of the organization, Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson thanked President Biden and fully endorsed Harris in this statement:

"We are deeply grateful to President Biden for his more than 50 years of public

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Joel Kim Booster
Puzzle can be found on page 29



Saying Goodbye to a Space That Belonged to All of Us

The mothers and fathers of Ann Arbor's Braun Court reminisce on the legendary gathering place

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In many ways, recent news about the future of Ann Arbor's storied Braun Court was expected. At some point in the not-so-distant future, the seven residential-turned-commercial buildings lining Braun's Kerrytown courtyard will likely be knocked down and replaced by high-end condos. As BTL reported in June, real estate developer Wickfield Properties has submitted the redevelopment plan to the city for approval. Already, preliminary work is underway at the site.

The unique commercial space has long been in decline, but for decades it served as an informal outdoor community center, a hive of queer nightlife and a hub of

LGBTQ+ entrepreneurship. Standing in the quiet, shady courtyard today, one would be hard-pressed to conjure the sights, sounds or even the smells of a once-bustling space that evolved into a nexus for queer community in a city that has wrestled with queer acceptance, despite a long-held reputation as a progressive Midwestern haven.

"At one point, we were battling daily with a homophobic neighbor," Martin Contreras, co-owner of \aut\ Bar, which closed in 2020, told BTL recently. "Lots of people didn't want us there." Contreras and business (and life) partner Keith Orr persevered despite the pushback, of course, leading the charge on creating a place where every member of the LGBTQ+ community ("and I mean

everybody," Contreras emphasizes) could feel safe to exist just as they were. The couple served as self-appointed caretakers of the space for over 33 years, "not including the couple years of construction and getting the buildings ready," Orr says.

There was \aut\ Bar, which the couple established after closing Mexican restaurant La Casita, followed by Common Language Bookstore (also owned by Contreras and Orr), Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project (later renamed the Jim Toy Community Center) and, finally, Trillium Real Estate — wide-ranging endeavors sharing an important central tenant: openly LGBTQ+ ownership and an authentic commitment to the local queer community. Braun was truly a space "for us and by us," as the saying goes

— a place where allies were welcome, but LGBTQ+ voices were centered.

"It really became this important, vital space," says Tim Retzloff, history and LGBTQIA+ studies professor at Michigan State University. "It became a gathering space — a place where, when the marriage decision came down, people just went there. When [Dana] Nessel announced her candidacy, that's where she did it. After Jim Toy's memorial, people naturally gathered there. It was a space unlike any other in Ann Arbor outside the university, and I think it's going to be a serious loss."

Braun Court was where, seemingly, the entire greater Ann Arbor LGBTQ+ community gathered in 2012 when a Michigan judge overturned the state's ban

on same-sex marriage, a decision in a case brought by April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, who had initially sued seeking to jointly adopt their five children. The case, led by out lesbian and future Attorney General Dana Nessel, was later a part of the Supreme Court Obergefell v. Hodges case, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. DeBoer and Rowse celebrated in Braun Court with a tearful crowd of well-wishers, and in 2017, Nessel announced her candidacy in the same spot.

Braun Court filled up in 2015 when the Obergefell decision came down, and again on its anniversary. The late advocate Jim Toy spoke at the event. "Sisters, brothers, President Obama has declared Stonewall a national monument," Toy said in his remarks. "If we're looking for a monument, look around us:

Braun Court is our monument. Braun Court is our history. Braun Court is our community. Braun Court is where we work. Braun Court is where we come together to celebrate."

The community gathered in the space during hard times, too, including the Sept. 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and following the Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016. "It was the place where you gathered whether it was out of joy or out of sadness," Orr recalls. "To this day, I think about Pulse Nightclub and I get a little teary for what happened there, but also for the sense of loss to the community. Our bars are supposed to be safe spots, and people were mass murdered in one of our safe spots, and so the community felt like it was an attack on communities across the nation. We gathered, and it was an amazing moment."

Orr isn't exactly sure which ingredients contributed to the recipe for success he found with Contreras, but he suspects a key element was safety. "There was a feeling of safety just walking into Braun Court," he says. "I felt it the first time I walked into the space, and I remember being really surprised." As the couple began renovating multiple Braun Court spaces, safety would remain a priority, even when it wasn't convenient — or cheap.

"We needed to do this right," Contreras recalled. "Our community deserved a nice space, something set apart from what we'd come to expect from gay bars in other places. I could never really convince some of our neighbors there that good outdoor lighting, for example, was important for safety, so we just took it upon ourselves

to invest in it because it was needed, and we knew it was important and that people would benefit from it."

Upgrading the lighting was a small endeavor versus the Herculean task it took to overhaul the residential buildings in Braun Court. Orr and Contreras added a commercial kitchen in a "postage stamp-sized residential kitchen," tore out the entire second floor of \aut\ Bar to upgrade the framework to make sure it could withstand the weight of hundreds of guests and added countless homey touches that introduced brightness and color to their own little corner of Keweenaw.

Orr describes a typical night at \aut\ Bar as something akin to staging a play. "You don't see the sets being moved into place — the props. It started in the morning on



(Left to right) Linda Lombardini, Sandi Smith, Martin Contreras and Keith Orr. Courtesy photo

Fridays and, by the afternoon, we were restocking the bar, getting ice in the bins and the kitchen is where the servers are rolling silverware and prep is continuing, but now the line cooks have arrived and they're starting to take things and heat them up for the steam table, getting specials prepared. Meanwhile, I'm in the office preparing the menu inserts for those specials," he remembers.

After a slow open around 4 p.m., Orr remembers things would be buzzing by 5. "There's a hum going on at that point because it's all of the machinery behind the scenes, turning, one hopes, like clockwork. And yes, it's like a play."

"I used to tell our staff, at 4 o'clock, the curtain goes up. Everything has to be in place: the props and the costumes. Everything has to be lit. The music had to be planned for different hours during the evening. Different light settings to create a mood and an atmosphere, and people don't think about all that when they walk into a restaurant, what had to go on there. Sometimes, we'd even call curtain time and

See **Braun Court**, page 26

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we'd always plan for a busy night. I hated running out of menu items."

To say Jim Leija's fondest memory of Braun Court is one he'll never forget is an understatement — it's where he met his husband 21 years ago in the upstairs bar at \aut\ Bar. "We met in a very old-fashioned way," he recalls, "upstairs through a mutual friend at the bar. We're about to celebrate our 15th wedding anniversary."

Leija, an Ann Arbor District Library board member and the Deputy Director of Public Experience and Learning at the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA), loves that the couple met before technology transformed dating. In the pre-dating app era, connecting with someone in person was much more common, and Braun Court was an ideal setting. "And so, yes, the idea of that space being gone, it's really hard to wrap your head around," he says. "There is a lot of sadness around the loss."

Leija says his earliest memories of Braun Court coincided with his time as a University of Michigan undergraduate, where he was involved with activism. In 2002, he remembers, the infamously homophobic Rev. Fred Phelps and several Westboro Baptist Church members protested just outside Braun Court, hoisting "God Hates Fags" signs. Leija joined a group of counter-protesters focused on non-violence and de-escalation tactics.

"As things were getting really heated, I was trying to

intervene peacefully. I was a music student at the time," recalls Leija, who is a member of PRISM Chorus. "I just started to sing Christmas carols, and the rest of the group joined in. One of the protesters said to me, 'You have a beautiful voice.' I replied that it was a gift from God, and she said, 'Too bad he wasted it on a fag.' I looked at her and shook my head and went back to the \aut\ Bar."

Inside, Leija was met with a warm welcome and a sandwich his friend had waiting for him. "What a relief, to be surrounded in that space by warmth and safety. That's the kind of thing we're so sad to lose in that space."

Still, Leija acknowledges that Ann Arbor is changing — and desperately needs new housing options. "We're a very different city than we were even 20 years ago," he says. "And I'm confident queer spaces will come back. Some are in the works and some, like queer Fridays at Necto, are still happening. Change happens, and I really believe that for everything, there is a season."

In 2001, across the shady courtyard, where a homophobic neighbor held out on selling for far too many years, a couple named Sandi Smith and Linda Lombardini started a new company, Trillium Real Estate, and ushered in an even more inclusive vibe around the courtyard. Together with the other queer and queer-affirming business owners in Braun Court, the couple became fixtures in the space. "Sandi and Linda" and "Martin and Keith" didn't even need last names within Ann Arbor's LGBTQ+ community.

About that one-time resident — the homophobe. Orr remembers him as a "madman." "He had a big construction fence up around the entire house, and he was extremely homophobic — I mean, we had to call the police on him on a few occasions," he says. "I remember one time, during the La Casita days, he came flying through the patio with a machete in his hand, screaming."

"Thank god Sandi and Linda bought the building from him," Contreras adds. "Not only to get him out of there, but way above and beyond that. It was like, 'All right, the courtyard's even a little gayer now!' And the eyesore was gone, too."

In the early days, Smith and Lombardini worked out of the

second floor of their building in Braun Court. Orr remembers running a phone line through the windows from one bedroom to the other and that the two women had shared early dates at La Casita — a true full-circle moment.

Smith holds fond memories of those early days and of Braun Court's significance over the years, though she's pragmatic about the way time tends to progress whether we are ready for it or not. "What we bought into was a vibrant community we were delighted to be a part of, and I think we all had a pretty darn good run here. But the community is gone. The buildings are in disrepair. It's just kind of sad if you walk through it right now. It's time to move on."

Moving on for Smith and Lombardini includes a new location in Ann Arbor — perhaps along the Huron River. "We're pretty excited about it," says Smith, who adds that she's confident they will find community in their new spot, too, where they will host events with a view of the water.

Trillium was the last business to sell, following the Jim Toy Community Center in 2015, Common Language Bookstore in 2018 and \aut\ Bar in 2020. Smith says many people approach her with sad feelings about the loss of Braun Court. "It was a treasure to a lot of folks who lived and went to school here, and it was designed in this very cool way. Probably a family built it with their extended family members who chose to be connected by the front porches in this very intimate setting," she says. "I think that intimacy with the gathering space in the center of those seven houses was appealing."

From the beginning, though, Smith says it was challenging to transform the residences into viable commercial spaces. "They were designed as houses, and as I'm sure Martin and Keith will tell you, there was always a need to improvise to make those spaces work. But that small, intimate setting is what really gave this kind of magic setting and a sense of security."

As a realtor, Smith knows the Ann Arbor homebuying market better than most, including the undeniable fact that it's a tight market with few homes available



Top: Braun Court construction in July 2024. Photo: Chris Azzopardi. Bottom: Jayne Rouse, April DeBoer, Keith Orr and Martin Contreras. Courtesy photo

Black Trans Women Leaders Share Love, Strength at Detroit Conference

Black Trans Circles event centers powerful women who are often overlooked

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The 28 women who gathered in Detroit from across the country for Black Trans Circles (BTC) came to the leadership conference in early July for education — wisdom gleaned from experts and from listening to one another's stories. But most of all, they came to the gathering, sponsored by the Transgender Law Center, for affirmation and a reminder of their strength as individuals and their collective power when they work together. Jeynce Poindexter, local trans advocate, co-executive director of Trans Sistas of Color Project and Ruth Ellis Center case manager, came to pour love into women who, as she knows firsthand, are frequently decentered, overlooked or targeted by people seeking to harm them.

"These women thrive outside the box and broader societal expectations," she tells *Pride Source*. "We wanted to recognize their survival as Black trans women or trans women of color at a time when the life expectancy of this group is only 35 due to the murder rate and violence."

In some ways, BTC embraces foundational tenets of the Pride movement, which, Poindexter acknowledges, began as a form of protest. "I wanted to host this in the middle of our Black Pride season because Pride, from the start, was a resistance," she says. "It was pushing back against discrimination, against profiling, against harassment and physical harm by the police in and around Christopher Street and the Village in New York. And it was two trans women of color who said, 'Fuck this. No more,' and literally picked up rocks and started stoning the police. And today, oftentimes at Prides, the trans women are left out."

"Honestly," Poindexter says, "you rarely see trans women being honored. We're thanked. But name one trans woman of color, one Black trans woman, who has been awarded, highlighted, put up on a pedestal. No, we are thanked for our innovation and our tactics, for the way in which we get things done. But we're

never having awards named after us. And so, Black Trans Circles is meant to do just that for those four days."

One participant, Ciera Dior Malone, a 20-year performer and local pageant title winner, says she was drawn to the BTC convening because it was an opportunity to be in the company of women she doesn't get to regularly connect with as well as women she'd meet for the first time. She says it was transformative to

against nature" statute on the books.

Poindexter says the women in attendance were awestruck while learning about Cooper's story and to find out that gay and trans panic defenses are still in place in several states (Gov. Whitmer just signed a ban on these defenses in Michigan on July 23). "It was very vulnerable to hear her speak about her experiences," Poindexter says. "But also



Black Trans Circles participants. Courtesy photo

listen to stories that were similar to hers, but that she rarely gets to talk about. "It's hard in everyday life, kind of a prideful feeling," she explains. "Because I don't want to feel like a burden to anybody, but I didn't feel like a burden with these ladies."

"From the beginning to the end, the experience was just going up and up, and the more I was around them, the more I felt like the ladies were uplifting each other," Malone recalls.

Mariah Moore, director of policy and programs at the Transgender Law Center, says the BTC program centers on leadership development for Black trans women and femmes through the "creation of healing justice spaces to work through oppression-based trauma and incubate community organizing efforts to address acts of anti-trans violence."

Poindexter says that at one point, national trans advocate and TRANScending Women Executive Director Wendi Cooper, who traveled from New Orleans, shared her story with the group. Cooper, who frequently speaks about her life experience, was at one point a registered sex offender because she was caught performing sex work in Louisiana, where there is a "crimes

inspiring. She's been able to get herself off the registry and now she helps people. She has taken the situation that was meant to take her out — that was meant to subjugate her — and not only did she survive and thrive through it, but now she's helping other people in Louisiana."

Other women shared stories about surviving the criminal justice system, getting out of sex work, losing their families, battling substance abuse and more. "And me, too," adds Poindexter. "I've been there. I can share my story and stand in that space of looking back and saying, 'Wow, what I've overcome, in spite of being a Black trans woman, in spite of being in Michigan where it was hard to get our humanity recognized.'"

It's that kind of open dialogue that Poindexter says is so powerful. There's much to be gained by sharing authentically, even when it's painful — or perhaps, especially when it is. "It takes a certain level of tenacity, strength, focus and will to push through. And these ladies have that. That's why they are leaders, and why we pour as much love into them as we can."

For an expanded version of this article, visit PrideSource.com.

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1 Chris Sutton

Continued from page 20

always been extremely humble regarding my film work, but when Nzere saw my 2011 HTJ recap with this almost tangible joy in his eyes, he immediately saw something creatively magical in me that I had difficulty seeing in myself.

From that rainy spring day in 2012, when I first showcased my film work to Nzere, we have been in constant conversation in developing a documentary highlighting the story of LGBT Detroit and the community we serve. Fast forward 12 years later, as we celebrate the 30-year anniversary of LGBT Detroit, we are finally ready to share "30 Years of LGBT Detroit" with the world.

How does it feel to make a film where you are part of the evolving story of the film's subject matter?

It's almost polarizing to develop this film and constantly reflect on my own experiences with people, places and pioneering moments with Detroit's LGBT community that have honestly molded me as a Black gay Detroiter. I have such a deep pride for my LGBTQ+ community and my city, which is a constant theme in much of my film work. As a nearly 40-year-old, openly Black gay filmmaker, the immense blessing of directing "30 Years of LGBT Detroit" has honestly been therapeutic for me since it has allowed me to reflect on how far we have come as a community and how much more we can still achieve moving forward.

Has the focus or concept of the film shifted given the nature of politics in an election year?

As an organization, LGBT Detroit has a long history of advocating and educating our community on the political stances that are impacting our human rights. This constant is only further amplified by the 2024 presidential election cycle, which can have a devastating impact on LGBTQ+ rights nationally. We've already seen laws passed across the United States, specifically in Texas and Florida, that are literally targeting the freedoms of LGBTQ+ people and stripping away the rights we have sacrificed so much for.

With this documentary, we want to reflect on the progress we've made in our fight for LGBTQ+ rights while simultaneously bringing greater urgency to how much we can lose if we are not vigilant on the political front.

Has filmmaking always been a passion for you?

My earliest memories as a toddler centered around creating stories and worlds with anything around me, from crayons to LEGOs. Growing up in Northwest Detroit, I had limited access to filmmaking tools, but when

I acquired a Game Boy Camera when I was 12 years old, my love for filmmaking flourished.

From that day on, I would use any cheap camera device I could get my hands on to make short films. While in film school, I purchased my first prosumer DSLR camera, a Canon T2i, and began doing freelance videography. Around this time, I met Nzere, who embraced my passion for filmmaking and hired me to film various projects within Detroit's LGBTQ+ community. My experience working as a freelance videographer helped me to creatively connect with community trailblazers and further crafted my passion for filmmaking.

So now, working as the full-time broadcast program coordinator at LGBT Detroit, it feels that my creative journey has come full circle with being blessed to direct the "30 Years of LGBT Detroit" documentary while honoring a community that poured into my love for filmmaking.

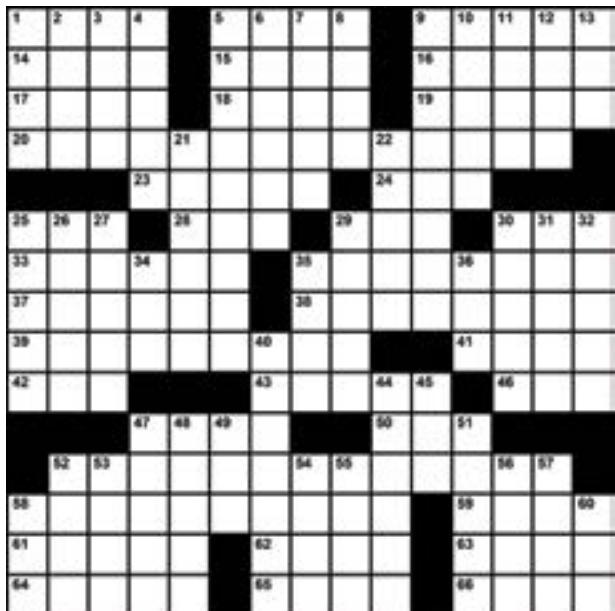
What do you love about Detroit and the people of Detroit?

Detroit is not only the city I was born in, where I currently reside and where much of my core community is based, but it is also what fuels much of my creative work. A significant portion of mainstream media has pushed this false narrative that, up until recently, Detroit was just some type of violent "Mad Max"-depicted wasteland that needed to be rescued by non-Detroiters and outside corporations using it as a "blank canvas."

The actual reality of Detroit is that it's always been, and still is, one of the most magnificent cities in the world and has literally cultivated much of American culture today. And the longtime, hardworking residents of Detroit have always been the foundation of its greatness. I hope with the "30 Years of LGBT Detroit" documentary, audiences can obtain a deep understanding surrounding the brilliance of Detroit, the people who are a part of this great city, and the LGBTQ+ community that continues to grow here.

What is something you want viewers to walk away with after seeing this film?

It's the collective power we have when we unite together as a community. I often witness LGBTQ+ people reflect on their gender and sexual identities as a curse or something to be ashamed of based on societal stigmas. To be honest, I used to be one of those individuals who felt my sexuality was such a shameful aspect of myself that, even as a child, I felt my life as a whole was a waste before I even began truly living life. I know I'm not alone in this common experience, and I hope with "30 Years of LGBT Detroit" our incredible LGBTQ+ community can see the power within themselves when we come together to celebrate each other.



Joel Kim Booster Across

1 Collette of "The Hours"
5 Coin for Kahlo
9 The way we word
14 "___ no idea!"
15 Where a trolley goes "Clang, clang, clang"
16 Frasier's brother
17 Actress Foch

18 Lesbos, for one
19 Western director Sergio
20 Start of a necessity of beginning standup comedy, per Joel Kim Booster
23 Exams on sexual technique?
24 Blow away
25 Singer Cole
28 St. Helens and others
29 "What's the ___?"
30 Dickinson's howe'er
33 Ancient Greek seer
35 More of the necessity
37 Novelist Proust

Down

1 Like Elton John's dancer of song
2 John Goodman's "Normal, ___"
3 Half of Mork's good-bye
4 "My Own Private ___"
5 How enlisted personnel tryst?
6 Stands next to O'Keeffe
7 River deposits
8 It slicks Feniger's pan
9 Like gay marriage, in some countries
10 One with a holey bottom
11 Personal lubricant ingredient
12 Hollywood's Rowlands
13 Suffix for Siam, if you please
21 Band on a limb

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22 Ethiopia's Selassie
25 One with wanderlust
26 Gaza Strippers, e.g.
27 Card of the future
29 Messing around the "Will & Grace" set
30 Campbell of "Martin"
31 Out-and-out nonsense
32 Day one
34 Hosp. area
35 Ill-humored
36 Liza, to Lorna
40 Message to an openly gay newsgroup?
44 "Get your rear in gear!"
45 Sweaty place
47 Hagar's dog
48 These are a few of my favorite things
49 Fed. book balancers
51 Melissa Ethridge's "Talking to My ___"
52 Cry after getting the shaft
53 Become frayed
54 Atop
55 Enjoy E. Lynn Harris
56 Big hole
57 Flamboyant style
58 St. Louis clock setting
60 You might say it when you get it

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4 Braun Court

Continued from page 26

to buy. "Yes, it's high-end condos, but we didn't sell out to the Big Bad Wolf," she says. "The realtor part of me knows that we need housing of all kinds. We need low-income housing, affordable workforce housing, middle-income and family houses and places for young families to start off right. And yes, we need luxury homes, because if we don't have them, then the top of the chain doesn't move and we don't get any of those kinds of housing going on."

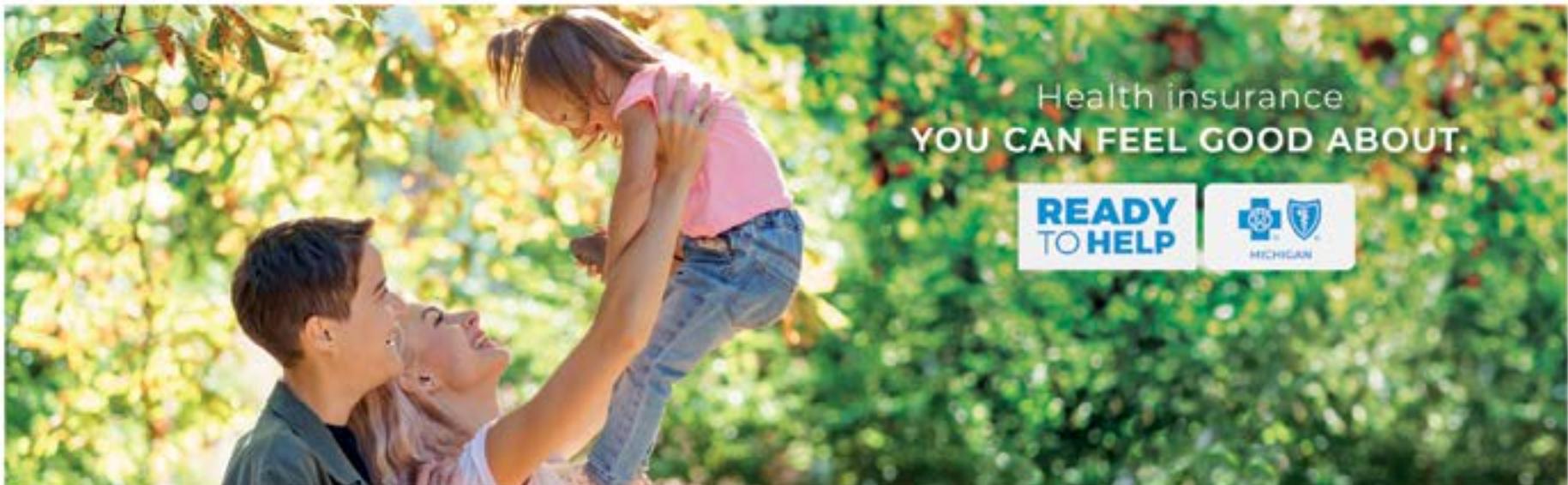
Ultimately, Smith says, people clearly want to be in Ann Arbor, and to accommodate them, new housing must be built. "We can't make people drive in from far-off places all the time," she says. "They want to live here, so let's create that space. That's what I'm taking forward — we're part of a foundation of a future of Ann Arbor."

"Braun Court was special, yes," Smith says. "People just knew to go there —



A busy brunch in \aut\ Bar's outdoor space. Courtesy photo

LGBTQ+ people, allies, friends, family, neighbors — and that's the piece I can take forward and say, 'We were a part of that, and we helped create that space, and that was really cool.' And that's also what you get to miss."



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